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ABSTRACT

Noting that children's play activities, particularly the development of dramatic scenarios, have been a central focus of developmental-interaction thinking over many decades, this paper explores the emphasis on play and the specific meanings accorded to it within this developmental-interaction tradition. The first part of the paper considers the views of play held by the tradition's founders--Harriet Johnson, Caroline Pratt, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell--and how this view was realized in practice. The second part examines writings by Biber and her associates that attempt to integrate the original lines of thinking with psychodynamic formulations. The introduction of psychoanalytic theory impinged on, and changed concepts of, play process and medium, sources of material, and the functions of play. The third section argues that certain contemporary developments in psychological theorizing provide new grounding for central ideas about play in classic developmental interaction. These are: articulation of symbolic mediation theory, as represented in the work of Werner and Kaplan (1983/1963) and Vygotsky (1986); a broadened view of cognitive functioning, in particular the idea of narrative as a fundamental way of organizing experience (Brockmeier and Harre, 1997; Bruner, 1986; Wells, 1986); and the theme of self developing in interaction with others, specifically peers, in social collaborative activity. (Contains 52 references.) (EV)

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Meanings of Play in the Developmental Interaction Tradition

Margery B. Franklin

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Children's play activities, particularly the development of dramatic scenarios, have been a central focus of developmental-interaction thinking over many decades. To understand the emphasis on play and the specific meanings accorded to it within this tradition, we must go back to the early part of the century and the progressive education movement. In this tradition, play was seen as a mode of learning, not only for preschoolers but for children in the elementary years (Johnson, 1972/1928; Biber, 1984). Therefore, play activities assumed a central place in the preschool curriculum and were developed in relation to social studies in the early elementary years. From the beginning, practice was grounded in a theory of the developing child. In addition, educational practice was informed by an implicit theory of symbolization – namely, the idea that recasting experience in symbolic form (as in play) is not only a matter of expression but a prime means for consolidating, extending, and creating knowledge. As the psychological theory base of the developmental-interaction view was formulated (Biber, 1967; Franklin, 1981; Shapiro and Biber, 1972), a second stream of thinking about play assumed importance. Psychoanalytic thinking, primarily in the form of ego psychology, emphasized the functions of play as a pathway for personal expression and growth, a means for gaining emotional insight and resolving conflict.

In the first part of this chapter, I consider the view of play held by the founders -- Harriet Johnson, Caroline Pratt, Lucy Sprague Mitchell – and how this view was realized in practice. The second part of the chapter examines writings by

Biber and her associates that attempt to integrate the original lines of thinking with psychodynamic formulations. I will show how the introduction of psychoanalytic theory impinged on and changed concepts of play process and medium, sources of material, and the functions of play. In the third section of the chapter I argue that certain contemporary developments in psychological theorizing provide new grounding for central ideas about play in classic developmental-interaction. These are: articulation of symbolic mediation theory, as represented in the work of Werner and Kaplan (1983/1963) and Vygotsky (1986); a broadened view of cognitive functioning, in particular the idea of narrative as a fundamental way of organizing experience (Brockmeier and Harre, 1997; Bruner, 1986; Wells, 1986); and the theme of self developing in interaction with others, specifically peers, in social collaborative activity.

Play in the Curriculum: Views of the Founders

Caroline Pratt founded 'The Play School' in 1914. Two years later, Lucy Sprague Mitchell established 'The Bureau of Educational Experiments.' The Play School became part of the Bureau in 1916; it continued as the City and Country School, later independently of the Bureau. In these years, Mitchell had considerable contact with John Dewey, and developed a close working relationship with Harriet Johnson who became director of the laboratory preschool organized by the Bureau of Educational Experiments. The founders had clear ideas about the importance of play in the life of the child and in the curriculum. They were not alone. The kindergarten movement, grounded in Froebel's teachings, had paved the way for a

high valuation of play. However, the founders' views drew directly on Dewey rather than Froebel.

Recognizing Froebel's contribution, Dewey argued against the idea that the child's imaginative play should center on the use of non-realistic materials and the kind of symbolism that Froebel believed to be central. So, for example, Dewey suggested that:

> The imaginative play of the child's mind comes through the cluster of suggestions, reminiscences, and anticipations that gather around the things he uses. The more natural and straightforward these are, the more definite basis there is for calling up and holding together all the allied suggestions which make his play really representative. The simple cooking, dishwashing, dusting, etc., which children do are no more prosaic or utilitarian to them than would be, say, the game of Five Knights [a Froebelian game]. To the children these occupations are surcharged with a sense of the mysterious values that attach to whatever their elders are concerned with. The materials, then, must be as "real," as direct and straightforward, as opportunity permits (pp. 123-124; 1990/1915).

In this passage and other writings, Dewey dissociated imaginative play from the kind of fantasy embodied in fairy tales and mythic or moral tales, and emphasized the meanings in children's representations of the everyday events and personal experiences that comprise their immediate worlds. He argued that children's use of objects such as leaves and acorns to represent plates and food in the context of pretending represents a highly significant conceptual development.

> ...when children play horse, play store, play house or making calls, they are subordinating the physically present to the ideally signified. In this way, a world of meanings, a store of concepts (so fundamental in all intellectual achievement), is defined and built up (Dewey, 1933, p. 209).

These meanings become organized into coherent wholes -- even the "'freest' plays observe some principles of coherence and unification. They have a beginning, middle, and end" (p. 210]. Thus, Dewey saw pretend play as a central path of intellectual development: the arena in which the child builds meanings through representation, and organizes these into coherent sequences in the form of stories or, as we would say today, narratives.

Dewey noted a significant passage from the young child's imaginative transformation of objects in the context of play to a reality-oriented approach that he identified with the emergence of work "as a mental attitude" (p.211), a stance in which the person's activity is directed by the selection of appropriate means to realize specific ends, and guided by "expectations and ideas...tested by actual results" (p. 212). The connection between play and the work orientation was clearly articulated:

> [The work] attitude takes advantage of the meanings aroused and built up in free play, but *controls their development by seeing to it that they are applied to things in ways consistent with the observable structure of things themselves* (italics in original; Dewey, 1933, p. 210).

The writings of Mitchell, Johnson, and Pratt show their debt to Dewey's views.[1] In addition, the topic of children's play in the educational context was

represented in other writings of the period (see, for example, G.E. Johnson, 1907; Lee, 1915; Wood, 1913). Children's use of materials to create small scale worlds, as in the block construction of a city, and their development of dramatic scenarios in which they assumed roles, were seen as central to the learning process, from early preschool well into the elementary years. The view of the child as active explorer and experimenter – with developing needs, interests, and capabilities – went together with ideas about how to construct the school environment to facilitate age-appropriate play for children in different phases of development. From the beginning, developmental thinking informed considerations of curriculum. Psychological development was conceptualized in terms of qualitative change in modes of thinking (see, for example, Mitchell, 1934). Learning was not seen as a matter of acquiring information, an orientation identified with the 'traditional view' and what may be termed the 'empty receptacle' theory of mind, but as a process of coming to understand the world one lives in and acquiring the range of capabilities that enables one to be an effective, productive member of society. These capabilities encompass the practical level of everyday problem solving; the ability to conceptualize; to reason in ways that are at once grounded, rigorous, and creative; to engage in what Mitchell termed 'relationship thinking' (1934). Contrary to critics' views, the academic skills of reading, writing, and solving arithmetic problems were to be learned and used – with the proviso that such learning and application take place in contexts meaningful to the child.

Learning through play begins early, close at hand, as the child explores and uses a range of materials in the classroom, as she comes together with others to

develop play structures and scenarios. The sphere of learning expands as the child extends her view beyond the immediate here-and-now to the environment of neighborhood and city, and then to the world beyond, past as well as present.

With Dewey, the founders believed that children's pretend play is spontaneous, that it will occur and in some ways develop without specific input from adults. However, to maximize play as an arena for the child's learning requires the teacher's participation. This should not be taken to mean that the teacher *plays with* the child, as some educators would have it. Rather, the teacher carries out three functions essential to rendering play an optimal learning experience: (1) She *selects* and *arranges* the materials for play available in the classroom and outdoor play space; these range from the classic building blocks and miniature props to dress-up fabrics, child-scale kitchens and related objects, to 'raw materials' such as crayons and construction paper; (2) she *plans experiences* that provide material for the children's dramatic scenarios; these experiences may be direct, as in taking children on a walking trip to a building site, or indirect as in discussion of material gleaned from books and photographs— centering, for example, on a topic such as Inuit life; (3) the teacher helps the children to *frame* their play; this is accomplished by talking with children about shared and individual experience, asking questions, providing feedback, in a way that provides context but allows space for the children's free development of dramatic narrative.

Further understanding of the founders' vision can be gained by considering exemplars: First, the use of blocks as a "medium of expression", as set forth by

Johnson (1972/1928, 1933); second, Pratt's discussion of how children's classroom play becomes part of the social studies curriculum (Pratt, 1948).

In her classic paper, "The Art of Block Building," Johnson (1933) charted the child's movement in the preschool years from free exploration of materials (carrying, heaping, arranging) to mastery of patterns discovered (enclosures, bridges), to building structures appropriate for full-fledged dramatic play of increasing thematic complexity (for example, the "garage," the "store"). Johnson emphasized that the child's use of blocks from relatively early on could be viewed as the development of an aesthetic medium, on a parallel with drawing which also begins with exploration, evolves into design and then becomes, in addition, representational.[2] Explicitly rejecting a "replacement" concept of developmental sequence, Johnson saw the child's interest in design as continuing and developing along with representation. She also noted individual styles, that some children are more interested than others in the decorative aspects of block building – for example, the addition of arches to the top of a structure.

For Johnson, as for Pratt, unit blocks were considered an exceptionally rich material that lent itself to multiple uses as the child matured and the curriculum changed. The educational value of blocks resides in the balance between their structural characteristics and the absence of a predefined identity: they can be used to construct everything from simple enclosures (in which the three-year-old might place farm animals) to elaborate buildings and, indeed, cities. The focus on blocks and block building was part of a more encompassing concern with providing a

physical environment geared to the child's stage of development and optimized to promote intellectual and social growth. As Johnson (1972/1928) said:

> To us the play activity of children is a dynamic process, stimulating growth and the integration of the entire organism as no system of training...could do. Therefore, in our choice of equipment we have tried to provide materials which would not only develop the bodies of children, but which would also have genuine play content and would follow the lines of genuine play interests...We try...to choose things that have a variety of uses or the possibility of progressive use. The blocks are the most striking illustrations (Johnson, 1972/1928, pp. 68-69).

It should not be supposed that the concern with providing an optimal physical environment superceded focus on the children's social environment. The two were seen as interrelated.

> Group life in the nursery school is as much a part of our intentional procedure as is the strictly physical equipment. Our plan takes cognizance of the fact that the children's responses will be stimulated by each other, that the *things* which form the material environment will have meaning as they are seen in use, and that a group...has a coherence that affects each member to some extent (pp. 85-86).

This passage hints at a theme more fully developed elsewhere, particularly in Pratt's work – that the classroom is a setting in which children interact with each other, not just 'socially' (in the sense of making friends and so forth) but in the initiation and development of group projects and cooperative learning. A line of development is discerned: Among two-year-olds, social play is "fleeting;" by three,

we see awareness of others and interactive patterns that pave the way for increasingly coordinated, planful, cooperative play. In part spontaneously, and in part through the teacher's curricular planning, a parallel line occurs in the shift from younger children's play which tends to center on personal themes (such as preparing food, feeding the 'babies') to the dramatic play activity of older children which involves content drawn from the child's widening world of experience and the sequencing of episodes into coherent narratives.

At The Play School (later the City and Country School), trips were considered an essential part of the curriculum, specifically planned to contribute to the children's knowledge and understanding of their environments and, more generally, of how things work. So, for example, the youngest children might be taken on a trip on the block, to observe (and have explained) repairs of pipes under the street. Seven and eight-year-olds were "taken into workshops and factories...to observe the processes and discover their significance" (Pratt, 1973/1917]. Following a trip to a building site and discussion of the experience, children were encouraged to draw upon their observations in the process of play, and to elaborate on them should they be so inclined. A more extended version of the approach was embodied in the curriculum for six- and seven-year-olds described by Pratt (1924, 1948) in which children studying New York City were taken on a series of trips as part of their group project of building a "block city." This kind of play was conceived as both reality-oriented and personalized in the sense that children were assumed (and encouraged) to be meaningfully engaged with all aspects of the process—emotionally as well as intellectually. After all, the content had to do with their lives in the city.

The overall theme (e.g. studying the city) was introduced and shaped by the teacher, but within this framework, the children made choices, became personally engaged, constructed narratives and developed scenarios that could well take off from what they had actually witnessed.[3]

In contradistinction to other educational theorists of their time, and to Piaget's later work, the early progressive educators did not see pretend play as dying out or being replaced by games with rules. Dewey and Dewey (1915) and Pratt, among others, saw the children's sociodramatic play as precursor to the development of more structured dramas. Drawing on material from extended study of a topic in the social studies curriculum (for example, the building of the Erie Canal, the witch trials of Salem, patterns of life among a group of Native Americans), children in these schools developed original dramas which were staged as plays for the school audience. Interestingly, these plays took shape through a process of improvisation and rehearsal, rarely involving written scripts. Thus, processes of play were recruited for extending the children 's horizons beyond the directly experienced.

The idea that *recasting experience in symbolic form* is a central means for creating new understandings, for imagining what might be, as well as for organizing and consolidating knowledge, was not yet formulated as a psychological theory. Yet it runs as a strong theme through early as well as later writings in this tradition. Ideas about the role of play, and its evolution from early exploration with materials to the representation of historical understanding, were also informed by conceptions of *the child in relation to the environment*. The child as active inquirer must be provided

with materials carefully selected and arranged to encourage the exploration and discovery that lead to genuine understanding – of the environment itself and the principles by which it runs. A third theme is found in the emphasis on play *as an arena for interpersonal collaboration and negotiation.* From learning to share materials, to collaborative building and the planning and enactment of extended dramas, children were encouraged to work cooperatively and to see themselves not only as individuals but as members of a group. Forms of play in the classroom setting both facilitated and exemplified these crucial developments.

The Middle Years

The ideas about play that marked the early period continued to be important in the middle period, from the 1940s to the late 1970s, but another stream of thinking entered the scene, concurrently with the move toward explicating the psychological theory base underlying educational practice. .

As early as 1917, Margaret Naumberg drew on psychoanalytic thinking to suggest that early play provides expression for "the buried material of the child's emotional problems" and that such "creative expression" could become part of the child's adjustment to group life (Naumberg, 1917, p. 45). In contrast to Naumberg, Johnson (1928) made only passing reference to psychoanalytic theory but like many teachers in the progressive education tradition, she attended closely to the emotional meanings of play.[4] The view of play, and specifically dramatic play, as serving multiple functions was articulated by Barbara Biber in a 1951 paper, "Play as a Growth Process" (Biber, 1984). Developing their dramatic play scenarios in a free

environment, children "find a sense of confidence in their own impulses" (p. 189) and "try out their talents for structuring life" (p. 189). At the same time, children at all levels "pool their ideas in free dramatic play, expose one another to new impressions, stimulate one another to new wondering and questioning" (p. 189). We must also recognize that the "inner coherence of play is as often based on emotion" as on reality-oriented thinking. In sum, said Biber, "play serves two different growth needs in the early years: learning about the world by playing about it (realizing reality), and finding an outlet for complex and often conflicting emotions (wherein reality and logic are secondary)" (p. 191).

These themes were elaborated, and to some extent redefined, in Biber's collaborative work with colleagues (Biber, Shapiro, and Wickens, 1977; Shapiro and Biber, 1972). On the cognitive functions of play, there was somewhat less emphasis on play as a means for learning about the world and sharpened focus on the kinds of thinking that play embodies and enhances. For example:

> ...it is a long distance between the three-year-old's playing a mail carrier...laden down with a heavy bag of letters which are offered as presents to anyone who will take one, to the seven-year-old group's building of a post office...The course of this thinking has qualities specific to the fact that the thinking is part of a play process. Where ideas are going to lead is undirected, and the enactment of one idea may generate new questions to be put through the symbolization process, new possibilities for roles to be taken, and a flowing "what if" thinking stance in planning new action—altogether a permanently important paradigm for the cognitive process (Biber, 1984, p. 193).

It seems that the imaginative, generative, "what if" possibilities of thinking in play assumed central position. Reality-oriented aspects, including play as an arena for cognitive problem solving, were not forgotten but taken for granted. The shift in

how to characterize cognitive functioning in play fitted together well with the turn toward psychoanalytic thinking. The child at play no longer exemplified Dewey's socially oriented, more or less rational thinker engaged in "experimental" inquiry. The child at play was now seen as an emotionally motivated inquirer whose thinking is imaginative in the broadest sense, permeated by personal interests and concerns, only sometimes oriented toward experimentation vis a vis "reality" (Biber, 1984, p. 196).

As Biber (1984) said, the view of play as a way of resolving emotional conflict was "introduced from outside the sphere of progressive education and was later absorbed into it, in different ways by different educators" (p. 195). The aspects of psychoanalytic thinking on play that figured in the developmental-interaction approach were drawn from ego psychology (Erikson, 1950; Hartmann, 1958). These theorists maintained the classic view that the child's play often expresses deep underlying issues as well as more passing emotional and social concerns, and thus provides a window on the child's psyche – a view that can contribute to the teacher's understanding of the individual child in relation to the group. While acknowledging this aspect of psychoanalytic thinking, Biber and her colleagues underscored Erikson's emphasis on play as a medium through which the child gains mastery over emotional conflicts and fears, expressing feelings in a safe space while taking steps toward their resolution. In line with psychodynamic thinking, it was assumed that the symbolizing medium of play makes possible comfortably disguised representation of sometimes fearful wishes and fears.

> ...the feeling and emotional phases of experience [are]...simultaneously interwoven with the speaking, role-taking, action patterns of the total play process...Under the cover of the symbols we see the wishes for strength, for power, or maybe for escape from pressure. The symbolizing provides safety for expressing otherwise unacceptable feelings...and it is believed that this symbolized expression decreases the toll that unexpressed hostility would otherwise take in the developing personality (Biber, 1984, p. 196).

Biber imagined herself integrating two strands of psychological thinking. However, it may be suggested that she was in fact attempting to transcend the established categories of "cognitive' and "affective" functioning that structured the field of psychology. In any case, the turn toward psychoanalytic thinking reconfigured the view of play in relation to educational practice. The medium of play (language, roles, props) and the play process were now seen as means not only for representing reality but for symbolizing fantasies, fears and conflicts that the child needed to express and simultaneously keep from consciousness. Thus, play was seen as having two levels of meaning. Sources for play themes now included the child's innermost fantasies and emotionally loaded events, as well as the kind of "real world" experience and interests that figured prominently in earlier formulations. In sum, the psychoanalytic view of play as providing a prime path for working through, mastering, and potentially resolving inner conflicts was now deemed as important as the functions of learning about the world, and the self in relation to others.

The Contemporary Scene

Since the beginning of the century, and continuing to this day, discussions on the value of play have ranged from construing play as frivolous, a merely pleasurable activity for young children, and viewing it as a central area of the child's social, emotional, and intellectual development. Some of those who defend the place of play in the preschool curriculum take the view that by the age of six, children should put aside such childish activities, at least in school, and turn to the serious business of learning to read, write, and manipulate numbers. On the other side, we find a growing group of educators and psychologists engaged in articulating and theorizing the significance of play beyond the preschool years. I suggest that three strands of thinking in contemporary psychology provide the basis for grounding and extending ideas about play that were central to earlier formulations in the progressive and developmental-interaction positions. As indicated earlier, these are: symbolic mediation theory, the idea of narrative as a fundamental way of organizing experience, and the theme of self developing in the matrix of social collaborative activity.

Symbolic mediation theory

A number of distinct approaches can be identified as symbolic mediation theories. They share three central theses: (1) The representation of thoughts or feelings in a tangible medium is central to human functioning; (2) there is a family of representational or symbolizing media, generally including language, depictive gesture, drawings and diagrams, and the use of objects and actions in pretend play; (3) symbolization may serve functions in addition to the important function of

communication – for example, objectifying (and thus gaining control of) feelings and fantasies, and organizing cognitive understanding. Two major differences among approaches may be readily identified: (a) the extent to which casting ideas or feelings in symbolic form is seen as transformative, constitutive of meaning, rather than enhancing or faciliatory, and (b) concepts of relations between symbolic form and symbolized content, as known to the symbolizer.[5]

A symbolic mediation view was nascent in the founders' work, and partially articulated in writings by Biber (1984); Shapiro (Shapiro and Biber, 1972; Shapiro, 1975); and Minuchin (Minuchin and Biber, 1968). In these comments, I will sketch an approach to symbolic mediation that draws on Werner and Kaplan (1983/1963) and Vygotsky (1978, 1986). In the Vygotskian literature, the phrase "semiotic mediation" is used rather than "symbolic mediation." Following the general semiotic model, it is helpful to think in terms of (a) ideas, thoughts, feelings as the 'stuff' to be represented in some medium, (b) the representational medium, and (c) the relationship between (a) and (b).

What are the sources of the *child's ideas in play*, the 'stuff' to be represented? These range from the child's personal concerns and interests to material introduced as part of a social studies curriculum. In all cases, the material has to be experientially meaningful, sufficiently charged with interest to motivate the child toward representation. The progressive and developmental-interaction approaches place emphasis on encouraging the child to draw on personal experience in the context of extending knowledge and understanding. This is true not only in the sphere of play but in work with arts materials (see Gwathmey and Mott, this

volume); for example, children in an arts class might talk about and then represent various ways in which they get to school. As previously mentioned, these approaches also emphasize how the child's extended experience -- gained not only at home but through focused curricular planning, ranging from trips in the neighborhood to reading about peoples of other times and places – can become material for pretend scenarios and subsequently for improvised theatrical dramas.

How shall we conceptualize the *medium of play*? As a first approximation, we can identify the following components: *Persons*, *actions, objects, space*, and *speech*. All of these figure in both sociodramatic play, in which children take parts of characters in the drama, and miniature world play, in which they act as stage managers, manipulating figures and providing voices as required.

Person refers to the bodily self, as present in the scene. In sociodramatic play, the embodied self takes on another identity, plays a role; in miniature world play, it is the source of actions required for play—such as moving figures or other props in accordance with the scenario being developed. In the former instance, the body is part of the symbolizing medium; in the case of miniature world play, it enables pretending but does not have a symbolizing function. Many of the *actions* carried out in the course of dramatic play more or less replicate gestures of everyday life transposed to the context of play. In the context of such play, these actions may be considered representational although, for the young child, the line between actually sweeping the floor and pretending to sweep the floor is often hazy.[6] In miniature world play, actions are not representational; they do not have a significatory function but are nonetheless essential to the play process.

In sociodramatic play, *objects* ranging from the highly realistic to the unstructured are psychologically transformed, imbued with new meanings, as they become props in an emerging drama. The much-used, decrepit plastic chicken is food for a family feast; a scrappy piece of cloth becomes a knight's cape. In miniature toy play, the use of construction materials such as blocks or Legos is complemented by the use of objects such as small figures, vehicles, and so forth. Here, too, the material forms – singly or in combination with others – are psychologically transformed and animated, as the children develop scenarios for which these materials provide stage set, characters and appurtenances.

Often taken for granted by researchers as well as teachers and child players, *space* is another important component of the play medium. In some cases, the actual physical space of the classroom area serves as a support for play but is not imaginatively transformed and should not be considered part of the medium. However, in many cases of both sociodramatic and miniature play, transformations of space are central to the play process. A corner of the room or space under a desk becomes a cave; an area of the floor becomes a river. How are such transformations effected?

In some cases, the actions, objects, and spaces contain sufficient clues to provide consensual meanings for children playing together, particularly if the children have similar experience and know each other. But in many cases, and for the development of all but the most rudimentary action sequences, *speech* plays a critical role (Franklin, 1983). Children's speech in the context of play serves the following functions: (1) establishing, specifying, and maintaining the play sphere;

phrases and interchanges serving these purposes range from "Let's pretend.." and "Would you like to play school?" to utterances specifically geared to keeping things going; (2) establishing identities for objects; these namings range from identifying realistic objects as such, often necessary for young players, to transformative namings of various kinds—for example, identifying a cardboard cylinder as a "rocket ship;" (3) establishing identities for persons, either by assigning roles ("you be the engineer, " "I'll be the caveman person"] or speaking in the voice of a character; (4) establishing the setting, as in designating a portion of the floor as a "field" or "lake;" and (5) creating and organizing the events of play; statements and interchanges in this category encompass: planning, describing and explaining to co-players or adults what is transpiring, and the dialogue and narration that comprise the play drama.

We may briefly consider *relations between (a) the ideas and feelings that reach expression in play and (b) the use of the medium*. Most symbolic mediation theories conceptualize the "stuff" or contents to be represented as more or less fully formed prior to the symbolization process. Symbols serve the important function of communication but do not enter into the formation of meaning. An intermediate position (Goodman, 1968) also sees symbolic forms as 'labels' which are attached to more or less fully formed experiential entities, but departs from the first view by asserting that the development of symbolic systems play a central role in the cognitive ordering of experience and building psychological worlds. A third position, which may be termed *radical interactionism*, argues that experience takes shape or is fundamentally transformed through processes of symbolizing. This view recognizes the communicative and ordering aspects of symbolizing but emphasizes, in addition,

that making meaning through symbolization involves a transformative interaction of relatively amorphous content and the possibilities of the medium. Werner and Kaplan (1983/1963) provide the strongest version of this position as it pertains to both language and non-verbal forms. Meanings take shape as they are given tangible representation in a medium. The medium is seen as a bundle of potentialities. Even a single object has several possibilities – for example, when a ball of cotton is taken as a rabbit, different qualities are salient than when it is a snowball.

Much of Vygotsky's discussion (1978] of the cognitive meanings of play is grounded in his semiotic mediation theory. Two themes are particularly relevant to our concerns. The first centers on the idea that when a child acts upon or views an object *as if* it were something else, while being aware that this object is distinct from that which it represents, she is separating conceptual meaning ["horse"] from its concrete embodiment [the stick which is being acted upon as if it were horse]. In Vygotsky's view, the act of pretending (and, specifically, object substitution or transformation) thus opens the door to the realm of abstract thought. This theme figures prominently in some contemporary discussions of Vygotsky's relevance to education (for example, Berk and Winsler, 1995). Equally important, Vygotsky argued that the child's entry into reading and writing is grounded in earlier symbolizing activities, including the use of objects in pretend play. The use of objects in play begins as gesture-grounded activity but at some point, children can treat objects as "signs" that represent given entities. Further, children can "read" a short narrative enacted with objects assigned arbitrary identities, such as "Two children (small sticks) ran after the dog (matchbox) who went into the forest (green book),

and then to the house (blackboard eraser)." This and other forms of symbolization lead to the child's "basic discovery -- namely, that one can draw (represent) not only things but speech" (1978, p. 115). The radical thesis that symbolization in drawing and pretend play provides grounding for the second-order symbolization of literacy has been developed and put into practice by Christie (1991) and Dyson (1993), among others. Dyson, building on Vygotsky, emphasized that the child's development of symbolic systems takes place in a social matrix, in the interchange in school with peers and teachers, at home with siblings, parents and other adults, within a cultural context structured by values and practices.

In sum, the articulation of an explicit semiotic mediation theory contributes to understanding the complex processes of pretend play, to conceptualizing how meaning is formed in the play process and exchanged between children in that process.

Narrative and the organization of experience

It has long been recognized that the child's development of scenarios in play reflects a more encompassing ability to understand and construct narratives that bring parts into a coherent, sequenced whole. Children's stories, initially embedded in play or closely related to drawing activity, become increasingly independent of concrete contextual support as the child begins to use language as an autonomous medium. The importance of stories as a means of personal expression, and simultaneously as a powerful medium for building communal knowledge and understanding, was recognized by the founders as well as others concerned with developing meaningful curricula for the learning child. In the 1980s, the

psychological concept of narrative was deepened and expanded by the proposal that narrative is a basic form through which experience is organized and made known to the self as well as others. It is, in Wells' (1986) words, a "prime form of meaning making." Proposing a distinction between two fundamental modes of thought, Bruner (1986) characterized the paradigmatic as the mode of scientific, logical reasoning. It rests on ordering observations in terms of categories and hierarchies of categories, and "the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized, and related one to the other" (p. 12). Narrative, by contrast, necessarily involves a temporal ordering of real or imaginary events in a meaningful sequence structured with beginning, middle, and ending. The arrangement forges relations between components other than, or in addition to, the kinds of causal connections evident in the paradigmatic mode. In other words, as Ricoeur (1981) emphasized, narrative accounts display both temporal ordering and a configuration of themes that interrelates parts or episodes.. Further, narratives are authored; they reflect and communicate the evaluative stance of the story-teller as well as serving referential functions (see also Labov & Waletsky, 1997/1966). The person as story maker, child or adult, is present in the telling.

Theorists who believe that narrative is a fundamental mode of making sense argue strongly that narratives are made and not found. Even the apparently straightforward recounting of a simple sequence of events involves processes of selection, interpretation, foregrounding and backgrounding, and ordering or arrangement.[5] These processes of creating narrative, as much as any formal features,

are the source of its strength as an instrument for making meaning in the human world.

Wells (1986) and Engel (1994) have traced the emergence and development of narrative in young children's story-telling and play. While the very young child often co-constructs narratives in collaboration with an adult, the preschool child begins to engage in co-construction with peers. The jointly constructed narratives of play range from planning and describing events to stories realized through dialogue between play characters. Narrative serves multiple aspects of meaning making: organizing experience for the self, creating imaginary as well as real-world scenarios, gaining understanding of emotional and social worlds, articulating ideas and feelings in a form that leads to shared realities.

The founders, and the theorists of the middle period, placed high value on the cognitive, affective, and social value of children recasting their experiences of self and world in the narrative forms of play. But they did not have an articulated theory to support their insights. Now, as narrative theory takes shape within psychology and related disciplines, it serves as an important resource for extending understanding and promoting innovations in practice.

Development of self in social collaborative activity

In the progressive education tradition articulated by Dewey and his contemporaries, one of the central goals of schooling was to provide settings and situations that would lead children to social collaborative activity. While the role of the teacher as resource and instructor was never neglected, the value of peer interaction, of children learning from each other and working together, gained equal

attention in educational planning. The classroom could be envisioned as a microcosm of a society in which people collaborated to solve problems creatively. One might say that the telos of psychological development in this tradition is becoming a reflective, thinking person who knows how to engage with others in a collaborative mode to the ends of becoming a productive member of a democratic society. While these values were maintained in the middle period, they were perhaps taken for granted; writings of the time reflect heightened emphasis on individual development (see Shapiro and Nager, this volume), and lesser emphasis on play as a route to extended social understanding or participation in the Deweyan democratic society.

Did renewed concern with group process in the field of education stimulate a change in psychological theorizing, or did reconceptualization within psychology lead to a shift of vision in educational thinking? In either case, a marked change has taken place in both fields, leading to a coalescence of focus on the formation of selfhood, mind, individuality within the social context. Vygotsky's work, variously interpreted by different scholars, is one of the prime forces in the tidal wave of change (Valsiner, 1988; Wertsch, 1985; Martin, this volume). In some versions of sociocultural theory, emphasis on the formative role of social environment and explanation in terms of processes of "internalization" (as conceptualized by Vygotsky) leads to a view of the individual as a relatively passive participant in her own development. Nelson (1996) suggests, for example, that Rogoff's (1990) version of the principle of guided participation renders the adult more active than the child receiving guidance. Valsiner (1988, 1994) embraces the idea of formation of mind in social context, but argues that however the person is formed, she must be seen as an

active agent contributing to her own development. How else can we interpret the appearance of novel features in children's activity, constructions that cannot be ascribed simply to social input? Valsiner's formulation, which preserves the notion of the person in conjunction with principles of social formation, seems singularly appropriate to the developmental-interaction position.

Play in the school setting may be seen as an arena for the reciprocal development of self and social collaborative activity. In addition to taking the role of the other in play, children receive extensive, differentiated feedback from peers (see also, Mead, 1934). They respond to each other and engage in negotiation over roles, power, and the distribution of goods (see, for example, Sheldon, 1996). They cooperate and sometimes argue during the process of building structures and creating the dramatic narratives of play. In all these exchanges, they articulate thoughts and feelings in a communicative medium, and listen to the viewpoints of others. If there is a particular goal, such as the construction with blocks of a farm or the Brooklyn Bridge, the children are also engaged in joint problem solving.

What are the bases for successful collaboration in the play setting and beyond? Four interrelated conditions must be met. First, some basic intentions, motives, or goals must be held in common. These may exist at the start of play or take shape in the process of negotiation; occasionally, we find cases in which co-players who have different but non-conflicting aims collaborate. Second, there must be intersubjective understanding. While some shared understanding may exist initially, it is generally elaborated in the play process. A third requisite is effective communication, which both depends upon and contributes to shared understanding

and the play process. Fourth, children must share or co-construct a repertoire of 'play moves' – that is, rules or maneuvers allowed or required in the play context.

Shared intentions, motives or goals are both general (and often not in awareness), and specific. For example, two young children may individually have feelings and conflicts about their siblings, mothers or fathers, other life issues and circumstances. When they come together to play, these background feelings and experiences can become channeled and realized in the specific scenario of a domestic scene – for example, a situation in which mother leaves baby in care of older sister. The latter is the specific focus, or "joint pretend focus" (Goncu, 1993) that is constructed in the play process. For young children, as Goncu suggests, the joint focus for pretend often emerges from recognition of each other's similar needs or affectively significant experiences. At older ages, the joint pretend focus may emerge from other kinds of experiences and or from themes introduced in the school context – such as the project of constructing a bridge, Indian village, or part of a modern city.

How is intersubjective understanding constructed in the context of pretend play? An aspect of such understanding resides in what the children bring to the situation in terms of shared background experience. For example, children who have similar home and community experiences may have an easier time establishing intersubjective understanding in the context of play than those who do not. Nelson (Nelson & Seidman, 1984) proposed that shared scripts derived from similar everyday experiences, such as having lunch or going to school, underlie a good deal of successful interactive play. Narratives constructed or co-constructed on the basis

of such scripts are not copies but versions of underlying mental sketches. For older children, scripts need not be derived from direct personal experience but can be built up from acquired knowledge and imagined situations. For young children, having had similar experiences may be requisite; older children can presumably imagine circumstances they have not directly experienced and develop another level of intersubjective understanding. It goes without saying that having had similar experiences or shared scripts is not sufficient. Communication is essential, not only for sound intersubjective understanding (which often involves clarifying background assumptions) but for planning and negotiating the play process. Metacommunicative messages hold a central role. These include invitations to play, statements about the play, and negotiations – messages that complement the several kinds of within-play communication such as speaking in the voice of a character. While some communication can be carried out non-verbally, speech is the medium par excellence for clarifying background assumptions and explicit goals, for articulating and resolving differences of opinion.

Finally, successful collaborative play depends on a shared repertoire of play moves. 'Play moves' have to do with how things are done. As adults, we have myriad rules or maneuvers for acting in various kinds of situations – what one says to whom, under what circumstances; how one conducts oneself at home as contrasted with work, in formal versus informal situations, and so forth. Observing children at play, we see that their conduct of the play process is governed by similar kinds of rules or maneuvers that reflect cultural assumptions about how things happen in the real world and, equally important, how different forms of play should be carried out. For

example: How are given characters supposed to speak? What kinds of things does a mother character do? What is an appropriate sequencing of events? Is it okay to shift from the possible to the impossible within a play frame? Children's frequent admonishments to each other in play make clear the importance of such rules. The more agreement there is on such matters, the more easily the play flows. On the other hand, absence of shared understanding about "how to do" play of particular kinds often leads to productive restructuring that advances children's mutual learning and collaboration.

In the school setting, collaborative pretend serves multiple functions. If we believe that self develops in the social matrix, then the complex interactions with peers in play must contribute importantly to that development. Play offers a unique space for the dual, and sometimes conflicting, tendencies toward self-expression and joining with others – the latter often involving adjustment and compromise. In pretend play, the child builds on what can be taken for granted and simultaneously extends and deepens intersubjective understanding. This depends upon ability to communicate and, at the same time, impels the development of communication as the child strives to understand co-players and to make herself understood. Whether shared pretend foci arise from individual experiences or are introduced as part of curriculum, they provide goals for collaborative activity.

The original vision of pretend play as an arena for the development of self in society, for collaborative activity and joint problem solving, is now supported by the renaissance of ideas first formulated in decades past, elaborated and extended in new work.

* * *

In this chapter, I have tried to show how ideas about play have evolved within the tradition of progressive education and the developmental-interaction approach, and to give an overview of three themes in contemporary theorizing and empirical work that support and extend the earlier ideas. This analysis provides grounding for continued exploration at the borderlands of education and developmental psychology.

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[1] For an extended and enlightening discussion of Dewey's thinking in relation to theorizing and practice on the contemporary progressive education scene, see Cuffaro, 1995.

[2] In this context, Johnson pointed to the significance of children's naming their block buildings. The line traced from exploration of materials to representation parallels Piaget's discussion of the sensory-motor period and the evolution of representational functioning which had not yet been published. It seems likely that both have a common source in ideas of the times.

[3] The general approach as well as some specific aspects of curriculum can be seen in some schools today (for example, The City and Country School, The Bank Street School for Children, Manhattan Country School, and the elementary school of Central Park East – all in New York City).

[4] In discussing how psychoanalytic thinking became part of the developmental-interaction point of view, Shapiro and Nager (this volume) remark that Johnson, as well as Biber, was influenced by Susan Isaacs' work.

[5] The widest difference is between classical psychoanalytic views on unconscious symbolization (as in dreaming) and highly cognitive views that posit a rational, 'objective' stance on the part of the symbolizer, as in 'Let x stand for y.' In relation to play, theorists such as Werner and Kaplan, and Vygotsky, assume a complex interplay of emotional, intellectual and imaginative forces, with emphasis given to fluctuations in the child's awareness of pretending—that is, using a stick in the context of play *as if* it were a horse while maintaining awareness that it is not.

[6] As Werner and Kaplan (1983/1963) suggest, "movements that derive from pragmatic actions but have become depictive gestures" differ, sometimes subtly, from the original actions, being abbreviated, elaborated, and/or stylized. Similarly, walking in the context of dance depicts ordinary walking but shows it within the medium of dance movement.

7 Vygotsky's discussion of the interpenetration of thinking and speaking can be interpreted as radical interactionism (Vygotsky, 1986, Ch. 7). In a recent discussion of relations between language and cognition, Nelson (1996) pointed out that psychological theories tend to see language and cognition as distinct domains and not interpenetrating; she proposes an alternative view that is consonant with radical interactionism. Neither Vygotsky nor Nelson explicitly extended the position to the non-verbal domain.

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